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Notes On My Theatre

By EUGENE IONESCO

I HAVE NEVER SUCCEEDED

I have never succeeded in becoming completely used to existence, neither to that of the world, nor to that of others, nor above all to my own. I sometimes feel that forms are suddenly emptied of their content, reality is unreal, words are only noises stripped of all meaning. These houses, the sky, are only facades of nothingness; people seem to move automatically, without any reason; everything seems to evaporate, everything is threatened—including myself—by an imminent, silent sinking into I know not what abyss, beyond day and night. By what sorcery can all this still exist? And what does all this mean, this appearance of movement, this appearance of light, these kinds of things, this kind of world? And yet, I am here, surrounded by the halo of creation, unable to grasp the smoke, understanding nothing, disoriented, torn away from I know not what which makes me feel that I have nothing. I contemplate myself, see myself attacked by incomprehensible suffering, nameless regrets, objectless remorse, a sort of love, a sort of hate, by a semblance of joy, by a strange pity (for what, for whom?). I see myself torn by blind forces, rising from the depths of me, struggling among themselves in a desperate conflict without issue; I am identifying with one or another of these forces, and yet I realize fully that I cannot belong entirely to one or the other (what do they want of me?), for obviously I cannot know who I am, nor why I am.

No happening, no particular magic can astonish me, no logical sequence of thought can convince me (no interest in culture), no one thing can seem more unusual than another, for all things

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—Jacqueline Feldine

Eugène Ionesco

are leveled, drowned in universal implausibility and strangeness. Existing and using a language seem inadmissible to me. Those who do not feel that existence is senseless can find, within existence, that this or that alone is sensible, logical, false, right. For me, existence seems unimaginable, but on the inside of existence anything is conceivable. No personal frontier can separate for me the real from the unreal, the true from the false; I have no criterion, no preferences. I feel that I am there, at the outermost limit of being, a stranger to historical development, not at all "in it," dazed, immobilized in that primordial stupefaction. All doors are closed to me, or perhaps they have all disappeared, as have all walls and all distinctions.

No doubt, what I have just said only represents the most extreme point of my state of mind, the truest. I am alive in spite of everything. And I sometimes write . . . plays, for example. I have been asked to say what I think of the theatre. What precedes may appear to have no connection, therefore, with the subject. As a matter of fact, I have the impression that I have only spoken of the subject, that I have not stopped speaking of it for a moment. Yes and no, however. The theatre, as well as literature or any other manifestation of cultural life, only interests me moderately, does not touch me completely; I attach no great value to what is communicable, or rather to what is already communicated, exterior to the development of things, to actions, to action.

For me, the theatre—mine—is most often a confession; I only make avowals (incomprehensible to the deaf, but that can't be helped), for what else can I do? I try to project upon the stage an inner drama (incomprehensible to myself) telling myself, nevertheless, that since the microcosm is an image of the macrocosm, it may happen that this torn up, disarticulated inner world is in some way the mirror or the symbol of universal contradictions. No intrigue, then, no architecture, no enigmas to solve but the insoluble unknown, no personalities, but characters without identity (they become, at each moment, the opposite of themselves; they take the place of others and vice-versa), simply a continuity without continuity, a fortuitous sequence without relation of cause to effect, inexplicable adventures or emotional states, or an indescribable but living tangle of intentions, of movements, of pas-

sions without unity, plunging into contradiction. It may appear tragic, it may appear comic, or both at once, for I am unable to distinguish the one from the other. I only wish to translate universal implausibility and strangeness, my universe.

All the same, perhaps I might establish certain differences; when I look attentively at something which seems to appear from the outside, and from which I am detached, then the precariousness of creation, the behavior of creatures, that of humans, their language which I seem to see, and which is hermetic for me, or empty, and somehow arbitrarily invented, their undertakings, everything falls apart, turns to nonsense, inevitably becomes laughable or burlesque, painful, and it is from this existential void that comedies may be born.

When, on the other hand, one lets his own phantoms grow, along with the remains of dark colors, of passions as violent as they are incoherent, which still cling to them, one knows that these contradictions will destroy each other in their vehemence, giving birth to drama.

I feel myself, then, carried away by the dramatic movement. But since stories are never interesting, I dream of finding theatrical projects in their pure state, and of reproducing them in pure scenic movements.

—1953.

WHEN I WRITE

When I write I don't ask myself whether I'm "writing something avant-garde" or not, whether I'm an "avant-garde author" or not. I try to say how the world appears to me, what it seems to me to be, as honestly as possible. Without thinking of propaganda, without attempting to direct the consciences of my contemporaries, I try to be an objective witness within my subjectivity. Since I write for the theatre, I only think of personifying, of giving flesh to a comic and a tragic sense of reality at the same time. Besides, this is not such a difficult problem; the *mise en scène* of my imaginary beings—which I consider to be real, as real as they are imaginary—comes about quite naturally, or not

at all. To want to belong to the avant-garde before writing, to not want to belong, to refuse or to choose the avant-garde is, for a creator, to begin at the wrong end; it means he is standing outside his truth, outside the question; he is acting in bad faith. I am what I am; people can take it or leave it. To succeed in being oneself is the real waking to consciousness. And it is by being completely himself that each of us has the best chance of being others as well.

As a child I lived near the Place de Vaugirard. I remember—it was so long ago!—the badly lighted street one autumn or winter evening. My mother held me by the hand; I was afraid, one of those childish fears; we were shopping for supper. On the sidewalks dark silhouettes were moving, people hurrying past—hallucinatory, phantom-like shadows. When I see the image of that street in my memory, when I think that almost all those people are dead today, everything seems evanescent, a shadow. I am seized by vertigo, by anguish. That is precisely what the world is: a desert, dying shadows. Can revolutions change anything at all in that? Both tyrants and enlightened men who have arisen since then have died also. The world is something else too. I had not yet grown out of childhood when, upon arriving in my second country, I saw a rather young man, big and strong, throw himself upon an old man, beating and kicking him. Those two have died also.

I have no images of the world aside from those expressing evanescence and hardness, vanity and anger, nothingness or hideous, useless hatred. Existence has continued to appear to me in this light. Everything has tended to confirm what I had seen, what I had understood in my childhood: vain and sordid fury, sudden shrieks stifled by silence, shadows swallowed forever in the night. What else have I to say?

All this is quite banal, obviously. It has been said thousands of times. But a child had said this to himself before learning it from so many others, who only confirmed his childhood vision. It is unimportant to me whether this vision is surrealist, naturalist, expressionist, decadent, romantic, or socialist. It is enough for me to think that it is as realistic as possible; the roots of reality plunge deep into the unreal. Don't we all die?

People will say that this view of the world and of death is a petty bourgeois one. Are children already petty bourgeois? Perhaps. I have found this same vision of the world in a great number of petty bourgeois of all centuries; in the petty bourgeois Solomon who, nevertheless, was a king; in the petty bourgeois Buddha, who was a prince; in the petty bourgeois Shakespeare, in the petty bourgeois St. John of the Cross, and in many other petty bourgeois—saints, peasants, city dwellers, philosophers, believers, atheists, etc.

I also note that this same "vision" of life or death, a very old and permanent vision, is modern as well, contemporary. Reading Proust, we see what a sense of the precariousness of existence arises from his universe of phantoms in lace, of loves and memories. In Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* don't we see the illustration of the wasting of man in time, a time during which nothing is accomplished, in which everything disintegrates amidst the din of revolts, against a moving background of societies overthrown, reconstructed, and overthrown again? And don't we find about the same thing in Brecht's *Mother Courage*? This play is a play against war, certainly, but that is only its secondary subject; time wastes away and kills, we are shown this during a war, but that only makes it seem more violent, more obvious; the destruction is more accelerated, and fundamentally it is not a question of man wasted in war, but rather of man wasting away in time, in existence.

Isn't evanescence the theme of many of Chekhov's plays? It is not the dying gasp of a society which I see in *The Cherry Orchard* or *The Three Sisters*, but rather, through a certain society, the destiny of all societies and all men.

Among all these authors we see diverse situations, different countries, different epochs, differing ideologies, but all these particular situations are only multiple realities in which I find a single situation, a permanent reality within changing realities which are like the different languages used to express the same thought.

I do not deny the possibility of another mental attitude; I am not opposed to the hope of Teilhard de Chardin's disciples or that of the Marxists, but I think I am right in affirming that a

work of art cannot help but express one or the other of these fundamental attitudes, that it is nothing if it does not go beyond the temporary truths or obsessions of history; if, failing to go beyond such and such a symbolist, naturalist, surrealist, or social-realist fashion, it does not reach a certain profound universality.

The avant-garde then, is only the current, historical expression of a non-current current (if I may say so), of a trans-historical reality. The value of Beckett's *Endgame*, for example, lies in the fact that it is closer to *The Book of Job* than it is to the boulevard plays and the *chansonniers*. This play has found again, across time, across the ephemeral fashions of history, a less ephemeral archetypal history, a primordial situation from which other situations flow.

What people call the avant-garde is interesting only if it marks a return to the sources, only if it joins a living tradition, across a sclerosed traditionalism, across worn-out academicism.

In order to belong to one's time, a blind sincerity, and hence a clairvoyant sincerity is enough; one does or does not belong almost naturally. One also gets the impression, that the more we belong to our own time, the more we belong to all times (if we break through the crust of superficial contemporaneity). The work of every authentic creator consists of getting rid of the dross, the clichés of a worn-out language in order to find a simplified, essentialized, newborn language, capable of expressing new and old realities, present and past, living and permanent, particular and at the same time universal.

The youngest and newest works of art are recognizable, and speak to all ages. Yes, it is King Solomon who is my true leader, and Job—Beckett's contemporary.

—1958.

THE HEART IS NOT WORN ON THE SLEEVE

I cannot answer all the questions raised by my courteous enemy, Mr. Kenneth Tynan in his last article ("Ionesco and the Phantom").[1] It would take too long, and I cannot continue to abuse

[1] In June, 1958, Kenneth Tynan, one of Ionesco's earliest and staunchest supporters in England, reviewed the reprise of *The Chairs*

the hospitality of the *Observer*. It would also be to a certain extent useless, since we would only succeed in repeating ourselves. Indeed, Mr. Tynan has already begun to do so. I shall therefore attempt to speak to the point and to answer only the questions which seem essential.

Mr. Tynan accuses me of being so enchanted by the means of expressing "objective reality" (But what is objective reality? That is another question.) that I forget objective reality itself in favor of the means of expression which I take for an end in themselves. In other words, I believe he is accusing me of formalism. But what is the history of art, the history of literature if not, first of all, the history of its expression, the history of its language? For me expression is at the same time form and substance. To approach literature by a study of its expression (and that, in my opinion, is what the critic should do), is to approach its substance also, to reach its essence. But to attack a worn-out language, to try to make fun of it in order to show its limitations, its inadequacies; to try to burst it asunder, for all languages wear out, coagulate, become empty; to try to renew it, to re-invent it, or simply to amplify it, is the function of every "creator," who by that very act reaches the heart of things, of a living, moving reality which is always different and yet always the same. This work can be done consciously as well as instinctively, with humor and, if one wishes, in complete liberty, with ideas but without ideology, if an ideology is a closed system of thought, a system of mediocre or superior slogans divorced from life, a system which is no longer integrated, but which continues to try to assert itself as though it were the very expression of life. I am not the first one to point out the distance, both in art and in "political" life, which separates ideologies from their realities. I place art there-

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for the *Observer*. In his review Tynan attacked Ionesco, maintaining that "Ionesco's theatre is pungent and exciting, but it remains a diversion. It is not on the main road: and we do him no good, nor the drama at large, to pretend that it is." Ionesco responded to Tynan's challenge and his answer was published the following week in the *Observer*. Thus began a debate which was to rage for over a month. Philip Toynbee, H. F. Garten, and Orson Welles added their voices to the dispute. The complete text of "The London Controversy," as it came to be called, is printed in Ionesco's *Notes et Contrenotes*. Ionesco's final reply to Tynan was never published in the *Observer*. TDR prints it here for the first time in English.—Editor's Note.

fore on the level of a kind of free knowledge rather than on that of morality—a political morality. I mean of course affective knowledge in which the artist participates completely, a discovery which is objective in its subjectivity, a revelation not a teaching, a revelation of the way the world appears to the artist.

To renew language is to renew our conception, our vision of the world. A revolution means a change of mentality. Every new artistic expression is an enriching experience which corresponds to a need of the spirit, a broadening of the horizons of known reality; it is an adventure, it is a risk, therefore it cannot be the repetition of a fixed ideology, it cannot be the servant of any other truth (because any other truth, since it has already been expressed is now outmoded) than its own. Any work which fullfils this need may appear unusual or astonishing at first, since it communicates something that has not yet been communicated in this particular way. And since everything lies in its expression, in its structure, in its internal logic, it is the expression that should be examined. In an argument one should see if the conclusion arises logically from the evidence for it is a construction which seems (but only seems) to be independent—just as a play, for example, is a construction which one should describe in order to verify its internal cohesion. The data of all arguments are verifiable, of course, by other arguments which are also constructions.

I do not believe that there is any contradiction between creation and knowledge, for the structures of the mind probably reflect universal structures.

What do a temple, a church, a palace resemble? Is there realism in them? Of course not. Yet architecture reveals fundamental laws of construction; each building reveals the *objective* reality of architectural principles. And of what use is a building? A church? Apparently to lodge people, to shelter the faithful. But that is their least important use. They serve above all as a revelation, as an expression of these architectonic laws, and it is to study these laws and admire their fulfillment that we visit deconsecrated temples, cathedrals, deserted palaces, uninhabitable old houses. Do all these buildings then help to better the human lot (which, according to Mr. Tynan, is the essential purpose of all thought and all works of art)? Of course not. And of what use is music except to reveal

other laws? In a certain sense then one could say that a column or a sonata is absolutely good for nothing. They are good for being just what they are. One for standing up, the other for listening to. And what is universal existence good for? Existing, that is all. But if existence helps itself out by existing, that is a matter of opinion and another problem, an unthinkable one moreover, since existence cannot help but exist.

When Mr. Tynan defends realist writers because they express themselves in a language which everyone can understand immediately, it is certainly a narrow realism that he is defending, despite the fact that he claims he will not defend such a realism which no longer contains reality and must fly to pieces. When everyone admits something, it is no longer admissible.

At the beginning of this century there arose what we have agreed to call a vast avant-garde in all the realms of the spirit. A revolution, an overturning of all our mental habits. Discoveries certainly are continuing, and intelligence is progressing in its research, which transforms intelligence itself and modifies from top to bottom our understanding of the world. In the West this renewal is continuing notably in music and painting. In literature, and particularly in the theatre, the movement seems to have stopped about 1925. I would like to hope that I am considered as one of the modest artisans who are continuing it. I have tried, for example, to exteriorize the anguish (I hope Mr. Tynan will kindly pardon me the use of this word) of my characters in objects, to make the decors speak, to visualize scenic action, to give concrete images of fear, of regret, remorse, estrangement, to play with words (and not send them packing) perhaps even by distorting them—which is permitted among poets and humorists. I have tried to amplify theatrical language. I believe I have succeeded in a certain measure. Is this blameworthy? I don't know. I only know that I have not been judged on these plays, for that does not seem to enter into the mind of a drama critic of the importance of Mr. Tynan, who certainly cannot be blind.

But let us return, for one last time, to realism. Recently I saw an international exhibit of paintings. There were "abstract" paintings (which Mr. Tynan seems not to care for) and representational paintings, impressionists, post-impressionists, and "social-

realists." In the Soviet pavilion, needless to say, there were only these latter. They were lifeless works—portraits of heroes frozen into unreal conventional poses, sailors and freeshooters in conquered chateaux, so academic they were no longer credible, and also some non-political paintings, frozen flowers, and the street of a city with *abstract* people, a woman in the middle, emptied of all life, inexpressive but exact, dehumanized. It was curious. And what was even more so, is that the wealthy bourgeois of the city were swooning with admiration. They were saying that this pavilion was the only one worth seeing, because even the impressionists and the *fauves* were beyond these people. It was not the first time that I had had the opportunity to note the identical reactions of the Stalinist realist bourgeois and the capitalist realist bourgeois. By an even more curious turn of affairs, it was clear that the social-realist painters were formalist and academic precisely because they had failed to understand their artistic medium sufficiently to take into account the substance. The substance of their works had escaped them, and the artistic medium had turned against them, had avenged itself and stifled all reality.

In the French pavilion, on the other hand, the works of Masson (certainly a painter who gives his exclusive attention to his methods, his means of expression, his technique) revealed a moving truth, an extraordinary pictorial drama. A prodigiously intense light vibrated there, surrounded by the night which fought against it. Trajectories appeared, lines spurted violently, and through dense planes a hole opened onto infinite space. Since Masson the artisan had left human reality alone, since he hadn't tried to track it down, thinking only of the "action of painting," human reality and its tragic meaning had freely revealed themselves precisely for that reason. So it is what Mr. Tynan calls anti-reality which had become real, something uncommunicable which was communicated. It was there also, behind the apparent refusal of all concrete and moral human truth, that reality had hidden its pulsing heart; while among the other painters, the anti-formalists, there were only desiccated, empty, dead forms: the heart is not worn on the sleeve.

Mr. Tynan agrees with me when he says, "No ideology has yet

abolished fear, pain or sadness. Nor has any work of art. But both are in the business of trying. What other business is there?"

This other business—painting, for example. Or having a sense of humor. An Englishman shouldn't lack a sense of humor. Please, Mr. Tynan, don't try, by artistic or any other means, to better the human lot. I beg of you. We've had enough civil wars already, and blood and tears, and iniquitous trials, and "just" assassins, and "ignoble" martyrs, and ruined aspirations, and prisons.

Don't better man's lot, if you really wish him well.

* * *

Several words for Mr. Philip Toynbee. I take back all the ill I said of Arthur Miller. Mr. Toynbee judges Mr. Miller's dramatic work by Arthur Miller's own ideas about dramatic creation. At best, I thought that this could only constitute a favorable predisposition. No doubt I was wrong. So I too am going to judge Miller's work favorably using something which is outside the work itself. I shall judge Arthur Miller's work from the photograph of Mr. Miller published in the *Observer*. As a matter of fact, Mr. Miller looks like a really nice fellow. So I admire his work.

Moreover, I am a bit surprised by Mr. Philip Toynbee's surprise at my affirmation that a man might be disturbed in his movements by society or by the air he breathes. I think that it is very difficult to breathe and to live; I also think that man may very well not be a social animal. A child finds it difficult to become sociable, he struggles against society, finds adapting to society a painful process. Educators can tell us something about that. And if he finds adaptation difficult, it is because in human nature there is something foreign to what is social, or something alienated by it. And once man becomes part of society, he does not always find it easy to get over it. What may result from social life, from life with others, has been shown us by Sartre himself (if Mr. Toynbee will allow me to mention him) in his play *No Exit*. Life in society is a hell, others are hell. People would like to get along without it. And didn't Dostoyevsky say that one could not live more than a few days with someone without beginning to hate him? And doesn't

the hero of Brecht's *A Man's A Man* lose his soul, his name, his individuality to the point of complete derangement by entering into the collective irresponsibility of uniforms?

I have done military service myself. My sergeant despised me because I didn't shine my boots well. How could I make him understand that there were other criteria of value than the shining of boots? And that shining boots didn't exhaust the extent of my humanity. The girls didn't want to dance with me at the dances because I wasn't a lieutenant. And yet I was a man—extra-militarily speaking. As for the general, he was so morally disfigured that he believed he was only a general and should go to bed wearing his uniform. Later on, I was an employee, and I definitely felt that I was "something more" than merely an employee. I think I was completely aware of my social estrangement, just as the most Marxist of Marxists denounces it, an estrangement which prevents the free development of the man. My play *The Chairs* was performed in Warsaw and in several other Polish cities, and the audience recognized my characters not as mentally estranged, but as socially estranged people. Moreover, they wore the overalls of proletarians, of workers. I believe that *all* societies are estranged, even and above all, "socialist" ones (in the West, in England and France, classes level off and interpenetrate more) where the political leader feels he belongs to an elite because he is enlightened, and where he is entirely absorbed by his function. Where there is a social function, there is estrangement (society is the organization of functions), for once again man is not simply a social function.

My lieutenant, when he went home, or my boss, alone in his room, could, just as I do, extra-socially, be afraid of death, have the same dreams and the same nightmares, or suddenly forget his social person and find himself naked, like a body on a beach, astonished at being there, astonished at his astonishment, astonished to be aware of it, facing the immense ocean of infinity, alone under the irrefutable, inconceivable, blazing sun of existence. And it is then that the boss and the general find an identity in common with me. It is in their solitude that they join me. And it is for that reason that true society transcends social machinery.

But that has nothing to do with the theatre. Excuse me. I am sorry.

—1958.

MY THEATRE AND MY CRITICS

When one hears about a literary, plastic, musical, or theatrical work, one wishes quite naturally to acquire a more specific knowledge of it and to know what is being said about what people are talking about. We ask the author to tell us what he thinks of his work. After the work has been exhibited, performed, or published, we can know what the critics think, so we jump at what they have written, then run again to the author to ask him what he thinks of what people think of him and his work. Inevitably there are often contradictions between the declarations of the latter and the judgments of his critics, a few of whom we go to see in order to discover what they think about what the author thinks about what they think. And so on. Consequently, passionate arguments take place; some are for, some against; scholarly discourses will establish that the work simply confirms such and such a theory, such and such a philosophy, or that it tends rather to oppose it, which of course requires people to be for or against the work, or against or for, depending upon whether one is or is not a disciple of the theory in question or out of question, for certain people may claim that it is rather this theory than that one which the work, according to what people say, is apparently defending.

In the tumult of debate we no longer hear the voice of the work itself; in the development of all kinds of points of view, it is always the work of art which is lost from sight. It seems useless even to look at the work any longer, since one can form an opinion of it from the opinions of others, and if sometimes one must make some sort of judgment after all, one simply judges, refutes, or adopts the opinions of others.

I won't say that people don't think today. But they think about the things a few masters have given them to think about; they think about what the masters think, if they don't simply think

what the masters think, repeating and paraphrasing them. In any case, we can observe that three or four thinkers have the initiative of thought, choose their arms and the terrain, and thousands of other thinkers, believing they are thinking, simply struggle in the nets of the three others' thought, prisoners of the terms of the problem imposed upon them. The problem imposed may have its importance. But there are other problems, other aspects of reality, of the world, and the least we can say of these thought-masters is that they enclose us within their pompous, or less pompous, subjectivity, which masks, like a screen, the endless variety of perspectives possible to the human mind. But to think for oneself, to discover the problems for oneself, is a very difficult thing. It is so much easier to feed on pre-digested food. We are, or have been, the student of such and such a professor. We have not only been instructed by him, we have been influenced by him, by his way of seeing things, his doctrine, his subjective truth. In a word, he has "shaped" us. It is chance which has shaped us; for if the same chance had placed us in another school, another professor would have fashioned us intellectually in his image, and undoubtedly we would have thought in a different manner. It is certainly not a question of rejecting the data presented to us, of scorning the choices, the formulas, and solutions of others. Besides, that is not possible. But we should rethink everything that people try to make us think and rethink the terms in which they want to make us think; we must try to see just what is subjective and particular in that which is presented to us as objective and general; it is a question of being on guard and submitting our examiners to our own unrestrained examination, and only then adopting or rejecting their point of view. I believe it is better to think clumsily and shortsightedly, as well as one can, rather than repeating the inferior, average, or superior slogans of the day. Even a stupid man is worth more than an intelligent, educated ass. My little platitudes and discoveries have more value, contain more truth for me than the most brilliant aphorisms can have for the parrot who merely repeats them.

Young people, especially, are the object of all kinds of appeals —as are the masses. Politicians want votes, masters of thought want disciples; a master of thought preaching in the desert would

be too absurd. One hopes to influence others, to win them, be followed by them, force them to follow you; whereas, instead of imposing his ideas and his passions, his personality, a good master should attempt to help develop the personalities of others. It is, I know, very difficult to tell to what degree the ideology of an ideologue is, or is not, the expression of a desire for self-affirmation, a will for personal power; that is precisely why we must be all the more vigilant.

In England, two or three drama critics set the tone. They are the most enlightened, the most competent critics, and those most read by theatre lovers and intellectuals. They are even, for the slightly superior public, guides of the theatre. One of them has an artistic and literary background. He has a feeling for literature, which is becoming more and more rare today, he is free, he is open-minded, he admits the possibility of several interpretations. The other critic, a Marxist, a dandy, is younger, with a slightly philosophical background, a former student of Oxford, very aware of ideologies, attentive to intellectual currents. Both of them have done me the honor of discussing my theatre in London, and making it known, from the time of the presentation in English of my first plays. *The Chairs,* for example.

Some time after the appearance of a very laudatory article on the play by the younger of the two critics, I met him at the home of a friend: I thank him and a conversation begins, during the course of which he suddenly declares that if I wished, I could be the greatest contemporary dramatist. "I ask nothing more!" I tell him, excitedly. "Quick, give me your recipe!"

"It's simple," he answers. "We are waiting for you to give us a message. For the time being, your plays fail to give the message we expect from you. Be Brechtian and Marxist!"

I answer that this message had already been given; so it was already known, adopted by some, repudiated by others, that at any rate the question was posed, that if I had to say it, I would only be repeating, and since I would be bringing nothing new, I could certainly not become, as he said, "the greatest contemporary dramatist."

The critic was vexed with me. And he let it be known. When *The Chairs* was revived several months later, he wrote a rather

long article in which he tried to demonstrate that he had made a mistake in his praise, and that upon seeing the play a second time, he had realized that it could not hold up. A similar thing happened to me in Paris with a young critic, less learned than dogmatic. This critic had asked me whether I agreed with what he had said about several of my early plays which he considered to be criticisms of the petty bourgeoisie. I told him that I only agreed partially with his affirmations. My plays were, in fact, perhaps a criticism of the petty bourgeoisie, but the petty bourgeoisie I was thinking of was not a class linked to a certain society, for the petty bourgeois was for me a being who is found in all societies, even those so-called revolutionary or reactionary ones; the petty bourgeois is simply the man of slogans, no longer thinking for himself, but repeating ready-made truths—hence dead truths—which others have imposed upon him. In short, the petty bourgeois is the man who is directed. I considered that this young critic himself, an anti-bourgeois, might possibly be a petty bourgeois. The very next day, the articles of this critic on the same plays became unfavorable, and yet I hadn't changed a single speech in the text in question. I had simply refused to admit his interpretation on all points; I had refused to play his game. This same critic had written for one of the large weeklies an article on my theatre and that of one of my confreres—an article illustrated by our two photographs right in the middle of the page. What these two dramatists have done up to now, the critic said, is very good, very useful; they have "destroyed" a certain kind of language, now they must reconstruct; they have criticized, they have negated, henceforth they must affirm. Affirm what? What the doctor critic wanted us to affirm, of course. I have not followed the itinerary this doctor outlined for me. The other author followed it; all praise has followed him on that rosy path; I was excommunicated, thunderbolts were cast upon my head by him and his friends, because for them only one kind of theatre is admissible, and coexistence is not a word they can understand.

If I had been shrewd, I could at least, by accepting his interpretation of my early plays, have saved them in his eyes. Some authors like to be appreciated by everyone, even through misunderstanding. My lack of diplomacy caused these early plays to become untrustworthy for certain doctors. As a matter of fact they were

rendered retroactively invalid, which makes me doubt seriously the objectivity of these critics, and also, above all, raises grave doubts regarding the possibility of criticism, since it can affirm at the same time—or almost—two contradictory opinions about the same work.

And this is all the more irritating, or distressing, sinçe when the critic is sufficiently ingenious, one judgment as well as another seems to fit the work equally well, seems to explain it perfectly, and satisfies the mind of the critic's reader. Eminent minds before me have wondered whether criticism is possible. One might also wonder about the validity of any ideology. When one can affirm indifferently, according to one ideological criterion or another, of a work of art, of an event, of a political or economic system, of history, of the human condition, that they are this or that; when several interpretations, without major internal contradictions seem to explain and integrate the facts into their system, and all of them seem to explain them; when one can find, and one always finds when one wants to, that these historical facts confirm, or carry water to this ideological mill as well as to that one, then that seems to prove that no ideology is definitive; it is only a view of the mind, a personal choice; it is not an objective truth. There remains science. And there remains artistic creation which, insofar as it is a construction, an autonomous universe, a monument, becomes an objective reality, even of course if it is subjectively interpreted.

To get back to our sheep; I mean, to our critics. I shall cite another case of incoherence in one of my literary judges. He is an academician, the very quintessence of the man of letters, a humanist, an impressionist. Obviously an impressionist has more right to incoherence that that critic who claims that he is following clearly established ideological criteria. Yet, the incoherence of the drama critic in question was too grave not to be shocking. His impressionism, or rather his impressions, were easily predictable when he had to criticize a kind of work belonging to a style he knew—classical plays, so-called "boulevard" plays, or even some different but already established kind of writing. A work which did not resemble the models he already knew, such a play, whether good or bad in the eyes of the younger or more daring critics, was incompre-

hensible to him, he could not grasp it. Of my first play *The Bald Soprano,* he said several years ago when it first appeared, "that it deserved at the most a shrug of the shoulders." Later, after having seen the performance of another play, *The Chairs,* at the Studio des Champs-Elysées, he wrote that it reminded him, but on an inferior scale of course, of a tale of Anatole France, but without fantasy, without invention, without wit. He ended his article by saying that he could not see how so dull a work could have been written by the author "full of fantasy and humor, of the brilliant *Bald Soprano.*" At the premiere of most of my plays, he regretted the dazzling author of the preceding play. Last year *The Killer* was presented at the Théâtre Récamier. He administered a long, sustained, savage attack, saying that the play was anti-theatrical, inaudible, unreadable, incomprehensible. He ended his review saying that he could not be accused of prejudice, since he had liked and defended *The Bald Soprano, The Lesson,* and *The Chairs* when they were first presented. He had, it is true, written a rather favorable review of *Victims of Duty* in 1953. We revived that play, with Jacques Mauclair, three weeks after the opening of *The Killer.* This time we were sure of getting a good review for *Victims of Duty* because our academician critic had only to refer back to what he had written about it himself—a disappointment! The critic of course could not deny that he had written what he had written. Willingly or not, he found a subterfuge to justify his ill-tempered article. The actors shouted too loud, he claimed; they performed less well than those who had created the play four years earlier. And yet, we had the same actors and the same director.

Formerly the crowds waited at the stage door to lynch the actor who had played the part of the villain. Today it is the author that the critics stupidly identify with his characters.

They also confuse what the author thinks of his work with the work itself. An English critic concluded that Arthur Miller was a great author because what Miller said about his own plays was most interesting; but their artistic quality was not even brought into question, as though it were entirely secondary whether Miller had even written plays, and whether they were good or not.

A professor, in turn, amiably reproaches me, insofar as my prin-

ciples are concerned at any rate, for taking a terroristic, nihilist stand which I defend with a vigor worthy of a better cause. But he says my theatre would not be so strong if it was empty. So why does he hold this against me?

Man is solitary and anguished only at certain epochs—in our own for example, where there is, the same professor says, a division of society into two groups at least. But doesn't the character of Hamlet express solitude and anguish, and isn't Richard II's cell the cell of all our solitude? It seems to me that solitude, and especially anguish, characterize the fundamental condition of man. And this professor who thinks that an economic and political revolution is automatically going to solve all the problems of man is a utopian, and less intelligent than my parrot.

Another critic reproaches me for evading the social framework, for, he claims, "every man lives in a certain civilization which nourishes him but which," he adds, "does not explain him totally."

My plays have never tried to say anything else. Just simply that man is not only a social animal, prisoner of his time, but he is also, and above all, at all times, different historically and in his particularities, but identical in his essence. Thus, if we can still hold dialogue with Shakespeare, with Molière and Sophocles, if we understand them, it is because they are profoundly, essentially, like us. I find that the universal man is not of an abstract, general humanity, but of a true, concrete humanity; and man "in general" is truer than man limited to his day, mutilated. And I have already said several times that it is in our fundamental solitude that we find ourselves, and that the more I am alone, the more I am in communion with others, while in the social organization, which is an organization of functions, man is only reduced to his estranging function.

I should add that the work of art has value because of the power of its inventions, since it is above all invention, since it is an imaginary construction; we apprehend it first of all, of course, through contemporaneity, its moral, its ideology, etc. But this is to apprehend it through what is least essential. Is the imaginary construction—made admittedly of materials taken from reality—useless? For some, yes. But why should literary constructions be less admissible than pictorial or musical constructions? Because

these last can be less easily turned into instruments of propaganda; the moment one uses them for propaganda, on the one hand they are perverted, and on the other they reveal themselves too clearly as propaganda. In literature, ambiguity is easier.

And if some people do not like imaginary constructions, it is nonetheless true that they are there, that they are created because they correspond to a profound need of the human spirit.

If there is so much confusion regarding the appreciation of a work of art, of a play, it is because no one really knows exactly what a literary work, a dramatic work, is. Re-read the *Little Preface To All Criticism* of Jean Paulhan; he will tell you, infinitely better than I, what all the ways of not knowing are.

Finally, what has been annoying for me in the criticisms of others? I think that what bothered me most, and what continues to bother me, is that I was not judged to the point. I have the impression that I have been judged not by literary critics or dramatic critics, but by moralists. By moralists I mean theologians, fanatics, dogmatists, ideologists of all colors. I am absolutely convinced that it is not this kind of passionate judgment which, in the last analysis, will have the upper hand. I may point out, however, that for the time being it is extremely irritating. The moralistic subjectivity of our contemporaries, caught in the storm of all kinds of passions, seems to me not only irritating, but blind and blinding. As for the subjectivity of posterity, it seems just as inacceptable, so that one wonders how to get out of the predicament. I hope, however, that the time of a relatively absolute objectivity, if I may say so, will come, after the storms.

Now I should like to touch on several details. When I state, for example, that a work of art, a play in the present case, should not be ideological, I certainly do not mean that it must lack ideas, opinions. I simply believe that it is not the opinions expressed which count. What counts is the flesh and blood of these ideas, their incarnation, their passion, their life.

A work of art cannot double for an ideological work, for in that case it would be ideological; it would no longer be a work of art, that is to say, an autonomous creation, an independent universe living its own life according to its own laws. I mean that

a play, for example, is its own undertaking, is an exploration in itself which must arrive by its own means at the discovery of certain realities, certain fundamental truths which reveal themselves in the development of the play, intimate truths (which do not prevent them from joining the intimate truths of others, which means that solitude does, or can, finally identify itself with the community), intimate truths, unexpected at first, and which are surprising for the author himself, and often for the author more than anyone. This may mean that imagination is revealing, that it is charged with multiple meanings which a narrow, everyday "realism" or a limiting ideology cannot reveal; in fact, since this ideology makes of the work nothing more than its illustration, the work is no longer a creation in process, an action, a surprise; everything is known in advance. Realistic or ideological works can only confirm us or pin us down in previous positions already too firmly established. We look too much in these works for the defense and illustration, the demonstration of what has already been demonstrated, and what therefore no longer needs to be demonstrated. The horizon is blackened, the world is a prison or a desert, no more unexpected events—therefore, no more theatre.

So I take the stand that realism, for example, is false or unreal, and that only the imaginary is true. A living work is therefore the one which surprises its author first of all, which escapes him, which baffles author and spectator alike, which somehow puts them into contradiction with themselves. Otherwise the creative work would be useless, for why give a message which has already been given? The work of art is, for me, the expression of a primary intuition owing almost nothing to others; by creating a world, by inventing it, the creator discovers it.

A dramatist who is too clearly master of what he is doing, or a poet whose creative work only strives to be the demonstration of this or that, succeeds in creating a work closed in upon itself, isolated from its profound merits. He is no longer a poet, he is a peon. I am profoundly distrustful of the theatre which we call didactic, for didacticism kills art . . . and so does teaching. The same lesson endlessly repeated is useless. Ideologists who are

more Stalinist than Stalin himself, sometimes dramatists of considerable talent, insist absolutely on saving or educating the world. But we know perfectly well that when religions speak to us of the salvation of the soul, they are thinking particularly of the hell where rebel souls must go; we know just as well that when people speak of education it usually leads to re-education, and we all know what that means. The peons on all sides, the educators and re-educators, the propagandists of various beliefs, the theologians and the politicians end up constituting the oppressive forces against which the artist must fight. I thought it my duty to affirm several times that two dangers menace the life of the spirit and the theatre in particular: a bourgeois mental sclerosis, on the one hand; the tyrannies of political regimes and directions, on the other. That is to say, the bourgeoisies of both camps. By bourgeois spirit, I mean conformity above, below, on the left, on the right, the bourgeois lack of realism as well as socialist lack of realism, congealed systems of convention. Often, alas, the worst bourgeois is the anti-bourgeois bourgeois. I wonder whether art couldn't be that liberation, the relearning of a liberty of spirit whose habit we have lost, which we have forgotten, but whose absence makes suffer those who believe they are free without being free (their prejudices preventing this), as well as those who think they are not or cannot be free.

I think I am justified in believing at any rate that an avant-garde theatre would be precisely this theatre which could contribute to the re-discovery of liberty. I must add immediately that artistic liberty has nothing to do with a repudiation of laws and norms. Liberty of the imagination is not a flight into the unreal, it is not an escape; it is audacity, invention. To invent is not to give up, to evade. The roads of the imagination are numberless, the powers of invention have no limits. On the contrary, to establish oneself within the narrow limits of anything resembling a thesis and within the limits of realism, socialist or not, constitutes just that blind alley. Realism is dried up, its revelations are faded, it has become academic and pompous, it is a prison.

—1960.

RECENT NOTES

Certain critics accuse me of defending an abstract humanism, the man from nowhere. In reality I am for the man from everywhere, for my enemy as well as for my friend. The man from everywhere is the concrete man. The abstract man is the man of ideologies, the man of ideologies who does not exist. The essential condition of man is not his condition as a citizen, but his mortal condition. When I speak of death, everyone understands me. Death is neither bourgeois nor socialist. What comes from deepest within me, my most profound anguish is the most *popular*.

Bernard Dort in his book on Brecht states that the Brechtian theories apply also to cinema. This Brechtianism, he says, is an epidemic but a healthy one. This delirious young critic speaks exactly like my character Dudard who, apropos of rhinoceritis, claims that there are some sicknesses which are healthy.

Universal decay is negated by scientific or artistic creation, even if, in the latter, we are shown the image of decadence or the reality of the wasteland; to become aware of it is already to go beyond it.

Understanding and creation, imitation and invention, real and imaginary, touch and are mingled together.

The work of art we give birth to was already potentially within us. It was only waiting the right moment to appear.

Yet another kind of theatre is possible. Of a greater strength and richness. Not a symbolist theatre, but a symbolic one; not allegorical, but mythical; having its source in our eternal anguish; a theatre where the invisible becomes visible, where ideas become concrete images, reality; where the problem becomes flesh; where anguish is there, a gigantic, living proof; a theatre which would blind the sociologists, but which would give thought and life to the erudite and common man alike, the former in that part of him which is not erudition, the common man, beyond his ignorance.

I must admit however, that it seems to me that something quite strange is happening today where literary and dramatic works are concerned. I have the clear impression that the discussion is rarely concerned with the work itself; it is concerned above all

with secondary issues. It is as though the work were interesting only insofar as it serves as a pretext for discussion. So, first of all, they ask the author to explain his plays; and his explanations seem to excite people more than the work, which is what it is and should be self-explanatory. It's up to those who read or see a play to explain it, taking the play itself as their point of departure. Go back to it. Avoid commentaries or else ask yourself what is the secret intention of the commentator's comments. One may, as I said, ask the author for information on details of what he has written, but that is actually the sign either of a certain inadequacy in the play, or of a lack of comprehension on the behalf of the readers or spectators. As a matter of fact, people want to know more about it; or know something else.

Everyone wants to collect confessions, or forced avowals. They don't believe in spontaneous avowals, which are true.

—Undated.

ON THE CRISIS IN THE THEATRE

Does a crisis exist in the theatre? It will end up by existing if we continue to talk about it. People think that a theatre cannot exist in a divided society. It can exist *only* in a divided society. It can exist when there is a conflict, a divorce with my administrators or my administrees (which goes beyond the idea of social classes), my wife or my mistress, my children and me, me and myself. There will always be divisions and antagonisms. That is to say, so long as there is life. The universe is in a perpetual crisis. Without the crisis, without the threat of death, there is *only* death. Therefore, there is a crisis in the theatre only when the theatre does not express the crisis.

There is a theatrical crisis when there is immobility, a refusal to seek the new; dead thought, that is to say, directed thought. Two kinds of directorship threaten us: passive directorship, that of routine; and active or doctrinaire directorship, apparently mobile, but already automatic.

—Undated.

THE SUBREAL IS REAL

And yet the space within us all is immense. Who dares adventure there? We need explorers, discoverers of unknown worlds within us, worlds waiting to be discovered.

The sergeants on the right and on the left want to give us a bad conscience for playing, whereas it is they who should suffer bad consciences for killing the mind with boredom. Everything is political, they tell us? In one sense, yes. But everything is not politics. Professional politics destroy the normal rapport between people, alienate them; *engagement* amputates man. The Sartres are the real alienators of the mind.

It is only for the weak-minded that history is always right. As soon as an ideology becomes dominant, it is wrong.

The avant-garde can please neither left nor right, since it is anti-bourgeois. Congealed societies, or those in process of congealing, cannot admit it. The theatre of Brecht is a theatre which finished setting up the myths of a dominant religion, defended by the inquisitors and which is in the heyday of its congealing.

We must go to the theatre as we go to a football game, a boxing match, or a tennis tournament. These games, in effect, can give us the most exact idea of what theatre is in its pure state: antagonism brought face to face, dynamic opposition, irrational clashes of opposing wills.

Abstract thesis against abstract antithesis, without synthesis. One of the adversaries has completely destroyed the other; one of the forces has chased the other from the field, or else they coexist without uniting.

—Undated.

JOURNAL PAGES

The word "revolution" is badly chosen by the "revolutionaries." It unconsciously unmasks the revolutionary action, which is itself synonymous with reaction, since, etymologically, revolution, which means return, is opposed to evolution. For me revolution is the restoration of a social structure or an archetypal state: authority,

even tyranny, hierarchy; the reinforcement, under an apparently different form, of the directing powers; the rehabilitation of rule and of the spirit of discipline which had grown lax because the worn-out language of yesterday's elite could no longer sustain them.

"A Jew isn't a man like me," the Nazi used to say. "I have the right to kill him." "A Negro is an inferior being; moreover, he threatens me. I must kill him!" said the white racist, for whenever anyone wants to kill someone else, he must claim that it is for legitimate self-defense. For the Negroes in certain regions of Africa, the white trader is the incarnation of evil, of the inhuman and diabolical. He must be killed. "A bourgeois isn't really a man; or else he is a bad or a dangerous man: he must be shot down," says the little thinker, the Marxist petty bourgeois. Isn't the bourgeois, according to Marxism, someone who has somehow lost his humanity? Brecht took the matter literally; in one of his plays the tyrants are giant marionettes whose heads are calmly cut off, for blood does not flow from cardboard necks; let's kill the bourgeois, don't worry, they can't feel anything. The same author wanted to show us, in another play, that it is unnatural for a man of a lower social class to feel friendship for another man belonging to an upper social class; if he does feel friendship for him, he will die of it and so much the better. The Christians thought they should kill pagans and heretics because they were possessed by the Devil and therefore dehumanized. For the angered Moslems, aren't Christians, in turn, *dogs*? And so on. One gets the impression that, in all epochs, religions, ideologies, systems of thought of all kinds have made it their only goal to give men a better reason to despise and kill each other.

Today, obviously, we have finally succeeded in "demystifying" racism, and we realize that the noble warrior's ideals were simply economic. What would we do if we didn't still have the bourgeois to kill and the petty bourgeois to laugh at? And the petty bourgeois is not a . . . "myth"; he is not a mirage; he is not something to be demystified, since he is himself . . . "unmasked." How could we invent a more extraordinary scapegoat? There he is, before you, within reach; all you have to do is help yourself. Before, alas, just anyone wasn't a Jew or a Negro. You had to find your Jew, your

Negro. Today, anyone can be accused of being a bourgeois or a petty bourgeois, if his ideas aren't exactly to your taste or if you dislike him; petty bourgeois, asocial, reactionary, bourgeois mentality, these are the new insults, the new pillories. And most often the accusers are themselves distracted petty bourgeois.

It isn't what people think that interests me, but knowing why they think as they do, the private, psychological reasons which have caused them to adopt this or that way of thinking. Only subjective conditioning is revealing and objectively true. Their feelings are true; their ideas I suspect. Behind each clear thought, behind each reasonable act, there is a hidden passion.

Demystification is all the rage. Why not demystify what remains to be demystified?

"Intellectuals," as a matter of fact—I mean all these *half-intellectuals* who struggle about in that vague domain half-way between philosophy and journalism—are a real sore of intellectuality; none among them is worth the least college sophomore; none, even less, is worth the smallest chemical researcher. Yet here they are, throwing their weight about, strutting around, endlessly discussing, scribbling from café to café, from newspaper office to newspaper office, petty bourgeois agitated by thought, followers wanting to be followed, overstuffed heads hoping to overstuff other heads in turn, conformist anti-conformists, confused minds believing themselves lucid; they are busybodies. Drawn by others, they hope to draw to themselves; weak and tyrannical, judges without enlightenment, they throw blame on all sides, excommunicate, want to make everyone admit to their way of thinking, although it is unstable and on the wane, directed by others even though they are unaware of it. And their will to rule "by the mind," "intellectually," and under cover of the best of reasons, is all the greater since they are themselves ruled and are at the mercy of several great tyrants who have only to raise regally a little finger in order to change the course of things, the face of history, without taking the trouble to ask anyone's advice, or to think of established historical laws, or upsetting their followers' theories—isn't the role of petty intellectuals that of finding new justifications?

History is among the obsessions of the half-intellectuals—"to

be in the current of history." History, which till recently was the knowledge of the events of the past, has become the science of the present and of the future, a technique for prophesies, a written and unwritten Bible, Law, Divinity, Myth; and a myth which is all the more powerful because the demystifiers themselves not only tolerate it, but want to inflict it upon us.

History is a myth for them precisely because petty intellectuals, impotent people dreaming of power, do not make history; even the justifications of the events are not invented by them. One or two slogans, secretly secreted by two or three anonymous secretaries of the great chiefs, in the closed bureaus of government propaganda, or other directive organisms, are launched. The petty intellectuals record them, imagining that all that comes from themselves; they develop them, write articles about them, lectures, courses, books, doctrines. Thus the justifications are spread abroad; thus they fill the world; thus their sources are forgotten. So the busybodies are useful after all.

And history is made outside the law: Chief of State X meets Chief of State Z, who meets Chief of State W, who sees Chief Y, and so forth. They decide on the general direction of "history" among themselves. We depend entirely upon them. We are at their mercy. Most of them are sergeants, half-ignorant, more or less boorish and hard (unless they are too refined, which makes them weak, and bad leaders), who don't have the complex of history like the petty intellectuals, because they are truly powerful, and create events.

Some of the petty intellectuals, possessed by a *libido dominandi* also dabble in theatre. They preach a didactic theatre, of course, an excellent means for acting upon others, for exercising influence. But these Stalinists, or these Calvinists, do not write plays themselves; they only constitute a small group of young doctors and pedants with their magazine, their club, their discussions, their entries in several other publications. They don't so much love one thing or the other; they detest, above all, the "petty bourgeois," naturally.

In order to win them to their side, they have defended, and won to their side, two or three authors. Who are the "petty bourgeois"? You, I, all those who, like me, have refused to be convinced and

to play their game, in spite of urgent proposals, and who are also the literary rivals of these two or three authors. Under the cover of a "noble ideology" (which they have assimilated, but which owes them nothing), it is fundamentally a question of a shabby literary rivalry, and now these authors can allow themselves to repudiate all the others in the name of their religion, to which, however, they have only recently been converted; and with the doctors, it is fundamentally a question of that will to power we spoke of. These same doctors had also, at first, taken my defense fiercely; then, since I refused to submit entirely and to follow them in their educative ambitions, they suddenly became my bitter enemies. It is true also that I attack them. They imagine then that if I repudiate them, the petty intellectuals, it is the *intellectuals* that I am challenging, for obviously there can be no other incarnation of intellectuality than themselves; and they treat me publicly as a "Poujadist," derived, I believe, from the name of another doctor whose dogmas were different from theirs.

Ah, if those people could hold power in their hands just once in their lives, what ravages, what an overflowing of power, what autodafés! Educational theatre would flourish officially . . . and whoever says educational says also "re-educational"; for those who refuse to be educated . . . surveillance . . . prison. . . .

There is nothing to do about it; whatever happens, I cannot have the immodesty to claim that I am trying to educate my contemporaries. I do not teach, I bear witness; I do not explain everything, I simply try to explain myself.

I do not write plays in order to tell a story. The theatre cannot be epic . . . since it is dramatic. For me a play does not consist of the description of the unfolding of that story; that would be to create a novel or a film.

A play is a construction, made up of a series of states of consciousness, or of situations, which are intensified, densified, then are tied together, either in order to be untied, or to end in an unbearable entanglement.

And why all this discussion?

The longer I live, the more I feel bound to life, of course. I sink more and more deeply into it; I am hooked, stuck, caught. I eat, eat, eat; I feel heavy, I sleep in heaviness. Before, I was a sword

blade cutting through the world, cutting through existence. The universe no longer seems astonishing, unusual, unexpected, as it used to. It seems entirely "natural." How difficult it will be to pull myself away from it! I've gotten used to it—used to living. Less and less ready to die. How painful it will be to free myself from all the ties I have made during an entire lifetime. And I don't imagine I'll last much longer either. The larger part of the race is already run. I should begin now to untie, one by one, all the knots.

Existence has become a permanent, obsessive dream; it "looks real"; it seems realistic. We sometimes dream heavily, caught within our dream . . . And then we are suddenly awakened, drawn out of it.

This dream of universal existence, this dream of "me," of "others and myself," which I shall no longer remember. "What did I dream?" "Who was I?" I often ask myself when I wake up with the confused memory of arresting, fascinating, *important* things which are already fleeing away, try as I may to grasp them, which sink forever into the night of forgetfulness—leaving me with only the regret of not being able to recall them.

Suddenly ripped out of "reality," this dream—I will die; I will not remember this theatre, this world, my loves, my mother, my wife, my child. "I" will not remember itself. And "I" will not be "I."

And yet, all this will have been. Nothing can stop existence from having existed, from being written somewhere, or from being the assimilated substance of all future transformations.

—1960.

HAVE I WRITTEN ANTI-THEATRE?

I believe that in the history of art and of thought there has always been, at each living moment of a culture, a "will to renewal." It doesn't characterize only the past decade.

All history is only a series of "crises"—of breaks, repudiations, oppositions, of attempts to return also to abandoned positions (but with new points of view, otherwise the returns would be "reac-

tionary" or "conservative"). If there is no crisis, there is stagnation, petrification, death. All thought, all art is agressive.

Romanticism was also an aggressive will to renewal; the simple wish to shock the bourgeois, the battle of *Hernani*, the romantic manifestos about the way of conceiving and expressing a truth opposed to the universal truth of Classicism, and above all the works themselves where a new system of expression asserts itself (a "new language," as people would say today), all expresses a will to renewal, and a very real renewal.

Parnassianism opposed Romanticism by attempting a return to a new Classicism; Symbolism opposed Parnassianism; Naturalism, Symbolism, and so forth. Literary history tells us this very clearly—at the level of secondary education.

Every movement, every new generation of artists brings a new style, or tries to bring one because it realizes, obscurely or clearly, that a certain way of saying things is worn-out, and that a new way of saying them should be found, or that the old worn-out language, the old form should disappear, because it has become incapable of containing the new things which have to be said.

What is striking first of all, then, in the new works is the realization that they are clearly different from the preceding works (if there has been an effort on the part of the authors, of course, and not imitation, stagnation). Later the differences will become less obvious, and then it is especially the resemblances with earlier works, the awareness of a certain identity and a definite identity which may prevail; everyone will recognize it and everything will end up being integrated with the history of art and of literature.

People can claim, I am aware, that, after all, there was nothing so new in all this. There was no new current of ideas in what we have done. I think it is still too soon to know whether there has been anything new or not. But perhaps in certain respects we are bound to the existentialist philosophies; perhaps we continue, each in his own little way, the great artistic, literary revolution of ideas that began about 1915 or 1920, which is not yet over, and which has been expressed in new scientific discoveries, depth psychology, abstract art, surrealism, etc. We don't know, we cannot yet know if we are or are not the craftsmen of a transformation of mentality; we have not yet had sufficient perspective to judge.

But once again in the new there is some of the old, and I even believe that this indomitable "old" is perhaps what is permanent, the permanent base of the human spirit which is precisely what can give weight, value, a guarantee that we are not off the track, but following a fundamental reality, which changes in particulars but, since it is human, does not change in its essence; Romantic works are not so "essentially" different, after all, from Classical works. Through different systems of expression, different "languages" the fundamentally human remains... and the differences are very slight from one decade to another, from one half-century to another; historical metamorphosis is slow; visible transformations take a much longer time than that.

If in what we have tried to do there is, all the same, something that is perceptible, it is the denunciation, in certain of our works, of the inanity, the vacuity, the unreality of the ideologies of right, left, and center. I don't like the words *crisis* or *criticism of language* or *bourgeois language*. That is to take things from the wrong side, from the outside in a certain sense. It is rather a question of an awareness of a kind of crisis of thought, which is manifested certainly by a crisis of language; words no longer meaning anything, systems of thought themselves being nothing more than monolithic dogmas, architectures of clichés whose elements are words like nation, national, independence, democracy, class struggle, as well as God, socialism, matter, spirit, personality, life, death, etc.

Since systems of thought *on all sides* are nothing more than alibis, something to hide reality (another cliché word) from us, something to channel irrationally our passions, it is obvious that our characters are mad, miserable, lost, stupid, conventional, and that their speech is absurd, that their language is disarticulated, like their thought. At this moment we are once again going through the experience of the Tower of Babel.

That, perhaps, is the message, an anti-message, which will have been left as a true testimony of our time, by *Waiting for Godot* of Beckett, as well as by the insufficiently known, ironically tragic little plays of Tardieu, the first plays of Roger Vitrac, the explosive *Akara* of Weingarten, *The Parody, All Against All, The Great and the Small Manoeuver* of Adamov—these last three

works reveal an objective truth, an extreme lucidity and exactness. Adamov has repudiated them, of course; he wants to have a faith. But it is the future which will say, better than Adamov, whether he was right or not in repudiating them.

And what remains that is fundamental or permanent in these new works, among the ruins of systems of thought *of all kinds* (and not only those of such or such a society)? Mockery, anguish, a pure state of confusion, fear; that is to say, the essentially human, tragic, reality, which from time to time, a doctrine or a faith succeeds in covering.

That is why one can be (and ought to be) both new and old at the same time. Our theatre bears witness perhaps to that *universal* crisis (felt psychically more than theoretically, for after all we are "artists") of thought, of certainties.

I should add that, when I sat down to write, certainly, certainly I wanted to "do something new"; but that wasn't my approach. I wanted particularly to say certain things, and I attempted, beyond the usual words, or through or in spite of the usual words, to say them. People decided that I was writing "avant-garde" things, that I was writing "anti-theatre"—vague expressions but constituting surely the proof that I had done something new.

Technical renewal? Perhaps in the attempt to broaden theatrical expression by making the decors and properties play an important role, and by simplifying, stripping down, the actor. The actors discovered a style both more natural and more exaggerated at the same time, something between a realistic character and a marionette, astonishingly different within the natural, natural within the astonishingly different.

Ten years . . . it is too soon to be able to know if one has really done something. So I shall never know. So I can die with the illusion that I have done something.

But I can assert that neither the public nor the critics have influenced me.

—1961.

Translated by LEONARD C. PRONKO